

What is claimed is:

1. A mail delivery system for delivery of mail to a user's physical address comprising:

a storage device; and

a processor connected to the storage device,

the storage device storing:

a program for controlling the processor; and

a database containing attributes of a plurality of printing locations,

the processor operative with the program to receive an electronic message that includes message attributes including a message recipient and printing criteria;

determine a recipient physical address responsive to the message recipient attribute contained within the electronic message

compare the message recipient physical address with the plurality of printing locations;

query the printing locations having a desired set of attributes responsive to the printing criteria attributes contained within the electronic message;

select one of the printing locations; and

send the electronic message to the selected printing location.

2. The apparatus of claim 1, in which the processor is further operative with the program to:

receive replies from the printing locations responsive to the query; and

select one of the printing locations responsive to the replies.

3. The apparatus of claim 1, further including a database for storing a user record, said record having a counter measuring use of the mail delivery system and operative with a promotional program to effect awarding of prizes to the user.

4. The apparatus of claim 1, the database further including a plurality of advertisements, advertising attributes and recipient demographics, in which the processor is further operative with the program to:

compare the advertising attributes to the recipient demographics;

select at least one of the advertisements; and

attach the selected advertisements to the electronic message.

5. A method for converting an electronically generated message to a physical mail object to be delivered to a mail recipient's physical mail address, comprising:

5 accessing an intermediate node from a sender's node on a global communications network;

after accessing the intermediate node, transmitting information to the intermediate node including message, message recipient, and printing criteria;

10 locating in a database at the intermediate node the physical address information of the mail recipient;

querying a plurality of printing stations distributed across the global communications network;

generating at the intermediate node a printing instruction responsive to the information received from the sender's node; and

15 sending the printing instruction to a selected one of the printing stations responsive to the step of querying the plurality of printing stations.

6. The method of claim 5, wherein information from each of the printing stations is stored at the intermediate node.

20 7. The method of claim 5, wherein the printing station information includes the geographic location of the printing station.

25 8. The method of claim 5, wherein the printing station information includes a printing capability of the printing station.

9. The method of claim 5, wherein the printing station information includes a printing capacity of the printing station.

30 10. The method of claim 5, further including the steps of:  
accepting bids from a plurality of advertisers having associated advertisements;  
selecting advertisements based upon the bids; and  
inserting the selected advertisements within the printing instruction.

11. A method for using a computer to facilitate communication between a message sender and at least one intended recipient, comprising:

inputting into the computer a message;

inputting into the computer a recipient physical address corresponding to the intended  
5 recipient of the message;

outputting the message and the recipient physical address electronically to a mail server;

querying a plurality of distributed printing locations;

distributing the message to a selected one of the plurality of printing locations responsive  
to the step of querying the plurality of distributed printing locations;

10 printing the message at the selected one of the plurality of locations; and

delivering the printed message to the intended recipient.

12. The method of claim 11, wherein the step of querying includes calculating a  
goodness factor based in part upon a proximity of the plurality of distributed printing locations  
15 to the recipient physical address.

13. The method of claim 11, wherein the step of querying includes calculating a  
goodness factor based in part upon a capacity of the plurality of distributed printing locations.

14. The method of claim 11, wherein the step of querying includes calculating a  
goodness factor based in part upon a capability of the plurality of distributed printing locations.

15. The method of claim 11, wherein the step of querying includes calculating a  
goodness factor based in part upon a price per impression bid by the distributed printing  
25 locations.

16. A method for dynamically arranging advertisements within a printed product  
delivered to a recipient, comprising the steps of:

storing a plurality of advertisements within an electronic storage system;

30 identifying which of the stored advertisements are in a ready state;

for each ready state advertisement, setting a base priority value;

modifying the base priority value according to predetermined criteria;

sorting the ready state advertisements into a list according to their associated modified  
priority;

resorting the list according to ad affinity;  
selecting a subset of ads to be used from the resorted list; and  
printing the selected ads onto a printed medium delivered to the recipient.

5 17. The method of claim 16, wherein the step of resorting the list includes:  
associating an ad type with each advertisement on the list;  
comparing the ad type of a first ad on the list with the ad type of a second ad on the  
resorted list; and  
reordering the second ad on the resorted list if the first ad type is incompatible with the  
10 second ad type.

18. The method of claim 16, further including the steps of:  
accessing demographic information of the recipient; and  
modifying the base priority value responsive to the accessed demographic information.